

# MARMADUKE PICKTHALL'S 'VEILED WOMEN' ESTABLISHES A TRAJECTORY OF ACCEPTANCE AND RESISTANCE OF THE EAST AND WEST ENCOUNTERS

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## ABSTRACT

*Marmaduke Pickthall, a western scholar who is known for his translation of the Koran, is a British convert to Islam. His literary creations are especially his ideological representatives of his acceptance of Islam. It discerns on the lines of amalgamating the Victorian legacy to Postcolonial study. The objective portrayed in the present novel, Veiled Women gives a vivid demonstration, epitomizing the moral values of the Victorian age and the diverging cultural inheritance of colonized people and their lands. In the Veiled Women, Pickthall attempts to draw the imbalances created by false stereotypes of the west. The novel traces the acceptance and resistance on the cultural and racial intervention eliciting the ideological colonization of Europe and West. The paper enunciates how the incongruous nature, presented through the protagonist Mary Smith, an English governess who has reconciled with the new religion, culture and family by marrying Yusuf Pasha, the son of Turko- Egyptian Mohammed Pasha, out of her will. Nevertheless, all unflinching, and daunting attempts are made to win over the atrocious remarks of Julia Long and Mrs. Cameron on religious and cultural differences and their opposition to the intermarriage of Barakah, a new name given to Mary Smith. The study explores the cultural intervention and the irrational apprehension discerned from the subversive disposition of the people around her. The novel expounds Pickthall's unfaltering convictions to the Muslim community and Islam, is deliberately marked in the unbending pursuits of Mary. The study argues in analyzing how the factors that come in between the flourishing new identity of Barakah's accepting eastern religious beliefs and nevertheless, the preconceived notions of the other people in the society jeopardize Mary's aspect of accepting Islam and rebukes her for many reasons. Eventually, the relationships when mingled are bound to strain in such a complex comparative design that it poses several questions. As a result, the interrogation triggers in an ambiguous mode that advertently and inadvertently approaches the far beyond fetching truth that might not be called off possibly from the personality or behavior of an individual as seen in the case of Barakah.*

**KEYWORDS:** Acceptance, Culture, Difference, East, Faith, History, Ideology, Post Colonial, Reconciliation, Religion, Resistance, Stereotypes & West

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## INTRODUCTION

Marmaduke Pickthall, best known for his translation of the holy Quran is a British Muslim translator and novelist. His multifaceted roles have distinguished him from the other writers of the twentieth century. His various other contributions of political journals and his acquaintance with many European writers made him to study the Political intervention and the profundity of cultures from the post colonial contexts. Earlier in his writings were renounced from the English literary canon due to his sympathies for Turks and later his works were accepted as a grim study. Pickthall's conversion to Islam and rejection to Christianity summoned him to face the

consequences in Europe as he was thus regarded as being queer, marked, singled out and outlandish. He became an outstanding member of the British Muslim community in London and Woking. He also became the patron of the khilafat movement under the support of the Nizam of Hyderabad.

### **The Background Study**

To begin with, there is a need to introspect a concern created by gruesome and distinguished political implication on the religious discourse of West and East cultures. The present paper is an attempt to surmount the reconstruction and deconstruction ideas and ideals, eliciting the heterogeneous identity that coexists in the East and west cultural paradigm. It brings in the blend of historical and ideological intervention of cultures that incidentally or co-incidentally meant to collide or to cope up with one another interests and sensitivities. Pickthall is on the assumption that the influences that are established on the East bears a whole complex idea of subjection to Europe and poses innumerable questions toward the cultural and communal identity that reiterates on its own to bring the reconciliation and harmony among the political and cultural imbalances.

Specifically, multiculturalism has often been regarded as the polarized, binary and conflicting study of discourse and rendered its attention from the mid-1960. There has been a considerable concern about the divergent cultures that lay in its binary oppositions amidst the peculiar intervention of modernity, resulting in the troubled relationships and persistent tension. Homi Bhabha, a post colonial critic whose major observation on hybridity has been targeted on the diverse identities and cultures. The diverse people are represented and misrepresented with equitable and inequitable dimensions. In other words, living life too distinctly and sharing their multicultural experiences of everyday mundane life in East and West social background inevitably dispenses the post colonial approach. Despite the fact that struggling with life that subdues their individual stance before being congenial to the nuances of the west, they discovered a “third space, aiming to emphasize the importance of the interrelationship between cultural identities, so as to foster a dialogue between differences”( Pratt 1992:519)

Post colonialism draws the impact of the cultural differences that veritably confines the history and literature, thereby making a general discourse of literary theory. As Ania Loomba describes “the shifting and often interrelated forms of dominance and resistance, about the constitution of the colonial archive; about the interdependent play of race and class; about the significance of gender and sexuality; about the complex forms in which subjectivities are experienced and collectivities mobilized; about representation itself; and about the ethnographic translation of cultures”.(Loomba2005 a:38)

### **THE CRITICAL OBSERVATION OF THE PRESENT NOVEL**

The protagonist of the novel, Mary Smith is a governess descended from the western community, is willing to marry Yusuf Pasha, a son of Mohamed Pasha who is of Muslim origin from Egypt. Although successful intermarriage takes place between them, there is always a tendency of opposition that navigates and places Barakah in bitter situations based on the religious conflict arising from the East and West divergence. The study evaluates on the act of subverting of the western stereotypes of Islam and Muslim people by illustrating how Pickthall is keen on exposing the prejudiced attitude of English people on Islam.

As the lines below speak the mind of a European lady; a leader of English colony Mrs. Cameron when she hears the news of Mary Smith’s strong determination to marry Yusuf Pasha. She reprimands her and tries to dissuade her from marrying a Muslim boy as stated below;

“My love, you must not be allowed to do it-you, an English woman! It degrades us all. I have lived out here for years, and I assure you that, if a daughter of mine declared her will to marry one of them, sooner than it should happen, I would kill her with my own hands”. (Pickthall, P- 27) To which Mary sneers her contempt as given below; “I say, you think because we veil that we are quite degraded, the same as we do, when we see your faces bare. Underneath our veils. In our own houses, we are just as happy and as free as you. It is too droll! ( Pickthall,P- 28). She further endorses saying; “You fancy that Mahometan women have their lives made miserable? Why, I have never known such happy women. From my rooms, I hear them laughing, playing, singing all day long”.

Barakah is an Arabic name given to Mary Smith; the meaning of which is ‘blessing’. She goes on vindicating a claim by pointing at Mrs Cameron. She rebukes by calling her ignorant of the fact of the Muslim culture as the words say; “Poor things! They know no other life”. (Pickthall, P- 28) Her acceptance of Islam has put her into a baffling situation which in turn has taught her how to resist. Her eluding comprehension on new religion, culture and family has made her hard and persists in the intolerance from the stereotypes of west. She further resumes explicating the ideas on polygamy as the lines evoke here; “Have you ever thought of what polygamy involves- four women, anyhow?”(Pickthall P-28) Being fastidious she adds; “It seems to me extremely sensible and kind to women. It takes into consideration facts which we slur over, cruelly. It gives to every girl a chance of motherhood.”(Pickthall P- 28)

Barakah’s discriminating and perceptive observation of new religions and life offers the shocking revelations of Mrs. Cameron. The conversation shared between them is extremely startling and unconvincing. Mrs. Cameron’s opposing ideals of European life compel her to change her mind, but Barakah’s defiant attitude never succumbs. She even poses the question of religion; “There remains another question on an altogether higher plane- I mean the question of religion” (Pickthall P-29). Her voice turns awestruck. “The consul tells me- but oh, no! It is too fearful!”( Pickthall P-29)

Barakah’s inference on the sullen and eccentric views of the elderly lady forces her to say doggedly, “I don’t see why.... They worship god as we do, and they count Christ as a prophet. They are no more fearful than the Unitarians in England. And I am sure they think much more about religion in their early lives than people do at home.” (Pickthall P- 29). Mrs. Cameron is out to dispose and charge against Muslim, the East with her barbaric response as she states, “They deny the essence of Christianity- the redemption. How can you turn your back upon that marvel of divine love? Their ideals are all much lower, more material.... I regret that I am not clever enough to make you see their falseness. To show how terrific is the gulf you view so lightly.”( Pickthall P-29)

The above notion provided by the Christian lady holds Barakah in disdain and contempt. Barakah’s preconceived and preoccupied note about Islam and its culture is quite deep and intense. On one occasion she surveys the nature that adorns with all beautiful glimpses, the minarets, the circling of a dove, to which she envisions the journey of pilgrimage to Makkah and ponders, “What scene in Christian Europe could be matched with this? Religion, but a mummy there, here lived and moved”. ( Pickthall P-118

Eventually, Barakah is filled with happiness and delight, writes a letter to her close friend, Julia Long who lives in England. She reverberates on her fortune and proclaims Egypt and the Eastern world with her sustained belief and moreover, she sincerely invites her to join Islam and offers companionship to her friend to join her in Paris. To which, Barakah receives a reply from Julia, “How can you write such wickedness? I heard that you married a Turk, but I thought, of course he was converted. No, I will not join you in Paris, and abet you in your infamy. I banish your most impious suggestions from my thoughts forever.”(Pickthall P-124) This gets her to sink to the ground level as she had high

hopes and was excited to receive her friend to have a good time with her.

The specificity of descending to adopt the new cultural state that either corresponds for the inclusion or exclusion of some cultural forms or the other so as to co-exists with the different cultural communities. This results in retaining and safeguarding the 'original' culture and identities that are found inherent in the character sketch of Barakah. (Hall 2000; 209)

Specifically, the Paper investigates the attributes of gender system, the religious and cultural elements that are inextricably entwined in the character. One cannot deny the fact that Barakah's combining attitude creates a huge, striking similarity with distinguished and notable deviations that are established in her conflicting nature. The old customs and values that are predominantly adhered by Muslim society seem to create its impact further with the European inter-marriage. Due to the deepened effect of the west with their dominance for liberal years and iniquity of life is deflated when a colonizer attempts to colonize the country and its people with its repressed state of domination, and for this reason, it has ultimately subjected to the great distortion and this is assumed as Orientalism.

The research problem carries on further with few illustrations, Veil acts as a symbolic manifestation in the Muslim community. This remains the most controversial issue in the post colonial and multicultural studies. The research proffers the significance of veil among the Muslim women as how those women are perceived by the west. In relation to this notion, there are many representations and misrepresentation and false malady that have marginalized these women. These women are targeted as weak, passive, sedentary and resistless who are insusceptible and lacking to question the authority, but only tend to remain silent as they are inaudible and unbearable, incapable of articulating their concerns or grievances. It is also true that they have been inclined to be "caught between tradition and modernization". (Spivak 1988:306).

Pickthall attacks and darts the questioning authority of west that intends to reprimand the Islamic culture and he goes on to exhort his ideas through the characterization of Mary Smith who is a converted Muslim. For instance, she expresses her view about the women who veil and she becomes self-contradictory when she utters her opinion as followed, "I say, you think because we veil that are quite degraded, the same as we do, when we see your faces bare. The difference is one of custom only. Underneath our veils, in our own houses, we are just as happy and as free as you are. It is too droll! (Pickthall,P-28)

However, it is noted that Barakah's union truly brings in the crucial cultural clashes that are apparently unavoidable due to her deep impact of the old racial pride of English life. Once she happens to meet women from Italy and South Austria, who are married to men from the East and have assumed veil. Notwithstanding, Barakah is filled with the inordinate spirit of European pride as she considers herself superior to them as suggested here; so as "To be ranked with them aroused her English pride. They were women of the lowest class and doubtful character." (Pickthall-P197)

One would be quite surprised to read the novel that speaks widely on the otherness of the historical denotation, cultural connotation and the factual acrimoniousness portrayed in it. Barakah is accepted and quite respected in the Eastern family, despite carrying the norms and standards of western living. Nevertheless, acknowledging the dogmas of religion, the act of allegiance to the eastern view of life, she presumed to defy the Islamic customs with the western people.

In essence, Pickthall unravels the harem life of women in the whole novel, reliving the idealistic life that predominantly observed in the Islamic culture. As can be seen, Aminah Khanum, one of the elderly ladies in harem tries to

preach Barakah, the Islamic principle on modesty. As follows; “It is unlawful to say that.... such scorn is not permitted among us” ( Pickthall-P197) She becomes reluctant to accept the cultural tenets on some occasions and tries to react, “She armed her dignity with the reflection that she was born above all Eastern women.”(Pickthall, P-211) However, Barakah is appalled to find the distinctive characteristic of harem life and feels proud of her choice of accepting Islam as it does not create the preconceived racial bias as seen in European country. As the lines suggest here; “was the equalling of black and white. The Muslim faith disowning all racial prejudice, a strain of Negro blood appeared in the best families.”(Pickthall, P-123)

On the other hand, Barakah is at her worst as pride overtakes her parental life when she trains her son to reclaim his superiority among the children of Egypt and British subsequently. As the lines portray her mental instability, “The English had ill-treated her most shamefully. Her son must hate the English for her sake.”(Pickthall, P-214) To the utter disappointment and disillusionment, he grasps all the racist ideas that are fed to him. Things turn out of control when he is prompted with adoration by harem ladies who named him, “a little tyrant” and a “young savage”, this act inevitably proves harmful to him. (Pickthall, P-214) Meanwhile, this transcends his limits and he starts boasting his social status and this has become a major cause that agitated the farmers and on the top of this, he is allowed to train the army of farmers. As a result, superior feelings are being resisted by fellahin (farmers). On witnessing this boy’s domination over slave girls, and other children and to farmers as well, the imperious attitude of this boy has fuelled the farmers who attacked and killed him in cold blood. Hence, Barakah’s attitude of excessive pride has become the cause for her own son’s tragic end.

In this unavoidable circumstance, she feels a total loss and reduces to naught in the harlem community. She feels a completely desolate, and her hopes and faith starts wavering between Islam and Christianity. As it is observed in these lines; “Prayer now took the Christian form, and now the Muslim; the two religions growing tangled in her tired mind.”(Pickthall, P-291) The study probes how Pickthall tries to bring in the reconciliation and re-establishment of the East and West religions on the universal faith and his supposition in Islam. There emerges Tahir’s call for prayer that bears a significant role in transforming Barakah. In addition, there is an elderly lady Murjanah Khanum, who counsels her saying; “Give up they will. That is to Islam true.” ( Pickthall, P-304)

The study analyses the trajectory that imbibes a note to accept and integrate the moral values in seeking guidance, surrendering to the will of supreme ruler that is to Allah. This idea altogether holds the author’s autobiographical implication epitomizing his own faith, ensuing solace and peace in embracing Islam. However, Barakah is not prepared due to the tragic event of her son’s death and its repercussion on her religious encounters. She further seeks the military governor who is in Cairo to revert to Christianity. As the words delineate on these lines, “I am an English lady. I turned Mahometan, and married a Turkish gentleman.... I want to leave him and return to Christianity.”(Pickthall, P-311) There is an unconvincing sound reverberates in the pitch of her words when confronting an English official that explicitly transcends her contradictory views and the realization is alarmed in her religious stance. As the lines here exclaim; “was completely out of touch with English ways” and “was not a European any longer.”(Pickthall, P-311) Finally, her acceptance and resistance on cultural and religious grounds have come to a standstill with the awakening of a new vision of Islam as substantiated in these lines, after “self- annihilation there was peace.”(Pickthall, P-314)

Given these notions, the paper probes amending the post-colonial perspectives and post communism behavior, the theory revert to, by and large; reflect the comparative approach between the East and West cultures. On the contrary, these

are dispensed by the varied ranges of articulations and epistemological scholarly controversies created by critics of post-colonial age resulting from a coalesce nature of ethnicities, religions, races, cultures and also from the great imperial legacies but are often considered subordinate except in rare cases. The study evaluates the social ideals encapsulated on the basis of cultural discussion with East and West encounter that takes place in terms of love, marriage, and family transcending the representational practices. The novel offers a comprehensive assessment of East and West practices with regard to acceptance, resistance, subversion, and experimentation of the Eastern life for a European woman.

## CONCLUSIONS

While the novel, '*Veiled Women*' thrives on identity, ambiguity, love, marriage, and relationship, it also brings a redemptive approach by pointing the social, cultural, religious, and racial tenets transcending the profundity of space and disorientation of history. The hostility of the East and the sovereignty of the west have imbibed a crucial disparity between the countries, a Muslim country on one hand and the European on the other.

The study epitomizes how the stereotypical ambivalence created a furor in the minds of the west, which is highly defiant and cannot be brought under control. Besides, the research reinforces or at least seeking to resolve the inordinate complexities adhered by the west upon the Eastern community. Pickthall is keen on exposing an antagonistic panorama or the undue western misconception perceived on Islam and above all he is attempting to reconcile the political, social and cultural affiliations between East and West. He augments the stance carried out by the imperial dominance and meanwhile dissents the acceptance of dogma and the revelations of protest and resistance as perceived in the characters of the novel.

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